

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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SUBJECT: THE GROWING PROBLEM OF NARCOTICS SMUGGLING IN THE
BAHAMAS

1. IT HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY APPARENT OVER THE PAST 6 MONTHS
THAT THE BAHAMAS IS OF GROWING IMPORTANCE AS A LINK IN THE
NARCOTICS SMUGGLING ROUTE FROM LATIN AMERICA TO THE U.S.A. THE
AREA, DUE TO ITS GEOGRAPHIC CONFIGURATION, IS MOST DIFFICULT TO
POLICE AND IT IS OBVIOUSLY IMPORTANT IN THE MOVEMENT OF MARIJUANA
IN BULK, PRIMARILY BY SHIP AND LIGHT AIRCRAFT, FROM THE NORTH
COAST OF COLOMBIA TO THE EASTERN U.S. WE HAVE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT
SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR COCAINE SMUGGLING - MAINLY BY
COURIERS TRAVELING ON COMMERCIAL FLIGHTS - HAS ALSO INCREASED
DRASTICALLY. A LARGE NUMBER OF CASES, MAINLY OF COLOMBIAN AND
OTHER NON-US NATIONALS, HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN THE PRESS. MOREOVER,
SINCE JAN 1, 8 AMERICANS HAVE BEEN ARRESTED ENTERING THE BAHAMAS
FROM LATIN AMERICA WITH LARGE (ONE KILO OR MORE) COMMERCIAL
QUANTITIES OF COCAINE. 4 SUCH ARRESTS HAVE OCCURRED IN THE PAST 4
WEEKS, THE MOST RECENT ON MAY 6 WHEN A YOUNG AMERICAN GIRL WAS
ARRESTED WITH 2 1/2 LBS. OF COCAINE. THAT SAME DAY BAHAMIAN

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AUTHORITIES ARRESTED A CANADIAN AND 2 OTHER NON-US NATIONALS WITH
QUANTITIES OF COCAINE RANGING FROM 1 TO 2 KILOS. ACCORDING TO THE
ESTIMATES WE HAVE RECEIVED, A KILO OF PURE, HIGH-GRADE COLOMBIAN
COCAINE HAS A STREET VALUE IN THE U.S. OF UPWARDS OF A QUARTER
OF A MILLION DOLLARS.

2. THE INCREASE IN COCAINE SMUGGLING THROUGH THE BAHAMAS APPEARS

TO RESULT FROM 3 FACTORS: (1) THE AVAILABILITY OF REGULARLY SCHEDULED DIRECT COMMERCIAL FLIGHTS FROM LATIN AMERICAN POINTS TO NASSAU; (2) THE RELATIVE EASE WITH WHICH THE COCAINE MAY BE DISTRIBUTED FROM NASSAU TO POINTS IN THE EASTERN U.S.; AND (3) MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE GROWING REPUTATION OF THE BAHAMAS AS A "LOW RISK" AREA FOR SMUGGLERS.

3. THE REPUTATION OF THE BAHAMAS AS A "LOW RISK" AREA RESULTS FROM THE NORMAL OPERATION OF THE BAHAMIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEM. IN THE VAST MAJORITY OF CASES THE MAGISTRATE FIRST HEARING THE CASE WILL EITHER SET BAIL IF THE CASE IS TO GO ON FOR FURTHER TRIAL OR WILL IMPOSE A FINE WITH OPTIONAL IMPRISONMENT IF THE CASE IS CONCLUDED. WHILE THE BAIL SET OR THE FINE IMPOSED MAY RANGE ANYWHERE FROM \$10,000 TO \$30,000, IT IS RARE FOR THE BAIL OR FINE NOT TO BE PAID QUICKLY AND THE PRISONER RELEASED. IN THE FEW CASES WE HAVE EXPERIENCED WHERE A PRISON SENTENCE AND FINE HAVE BEEN IMPOSED, IT HAS ONLY BEEN NECESSARY FOR DEFENSE COUNSEL TO LODGE AN APPEAL BEFORE A JUSTICE WHO WILL THEN SET AN APPEAL BOND PENDING HEARING. THUS, IN ANY EVENT, COURIERS ARRESTED HERE CAN SPEND ANYWHERE FROM ONLY A FEW HOURS TO A MAXIMUM OF A FEW WEEKS ACTUALLY INCARCERATED. IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT PERSONS RELEASED EITHER ON BAIL OR APPEAL BOND DO NOT SHOW UP FOR TRIAL OR HEARING. THERE IS NO ATTEMPT MADE TO DETER THEM FROM LEAVING THE BAHAMAS AND NO EFFORT IS MADE TO COMPEL THEIR RETURN. THESE FINES AND FORFEITED BAILS CONSTITUTE A SUBSTANTIAL INCOME FOR THE BAHAMIAN TREASURY. OUR IMPRESSION THAT THE BAHAMAS HAS DEVELOPED A REPUTATION AS A "LOW CONFIDENTIAL

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RISK" AREA HAS BEEN REINFORCED BY OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH ARRESTED AMERICAN COURIERS WHO, OBVIOUSLY WELL BRIEFED BEFORE THEIR DEPARTURE, DO NOT EXPECT TO SPEND ANY APPRECIABLE TIME IN JAIL. ON THE CONTRARY, THEY SEEM TO EXPECT VIRTUAL INSTANT RELEASE.

4. WITH REGARD TO DISTRIBUTION, IT DOES NOT APPEAR THAT COURIERS ARE RISKING DETECTION BY THE US PRECLEARANCE UNITS AT EITHER NASSAU OR FREEPORT. RATHER THE NARCOTICS SEEM TO BE MOVING ONWARD FROM THE BAHAMAS BY SMALL BOAT, LIGHT AIRCRAFT OR ON THE PERSON OF CRUISE SHIP PASSENGERS WHO ARE SUBJECT ON ARRIVAL TO LESS DILIGENT INSPECTION THAN AIR TRAVELERS. THE HEAD OF THE US CUSTOMS DETAIL AT NASSAU INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT REPORTED THAT HE AND HIS INSPECTORS HAVE DISCOVERED MANY TRAVELERS IN POSSESSION OF THE PARAPHERNALIA OF SMUGGLING, WHO HAVE RELATIVELY LARGE AMOUNTS OF CASH (\$3,000-\$4,000), HAVE TRAVELED FROM LATIN AMERICA TO THE BAHAMAS AND HAVE REMAINED HERE FOR THREE OR FOUR DAYS AND WHO ARE TOTALLY "CLEAN" AS FAR AS CONTRABAND IS CONCERNED. THIS LATTER INFORMATION ALSO TENDS TO INDICATE THAT DESPITE THE NUMBER OF ARRESTS BEING MADE BY THE BAHAMIAN AUTHORITIES, A SUFFICIENTLY LARGE QUANTITY OF NARCOTICS ARE GETTING THROUGH TO MAKE THE ROUTE FINANCIALLY VIABLE FOR THE ORGANIZERS, WHO TEND TO USE LARGE NUMBERS OF NON-PROFESSIONAL COURIERS IN A "SHOTGUN" EFFECT.

5. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE GROWING INCREASE IN COMMERCIAL COCAINE SMUGGLING THROUGH THE BAHAMAS ARE SERIOUS. FIRST OF ALL, SINCE NON-PROFESSIONAL COURIERS WHO MAKE AT MOST TWO OR THREE RUNS ARE MOST COMMONLY USED, WE CAN EXPECT AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF AMERICANS BEING ARRESTED FOR SMUGGLING. IN THIS REGARD WE HAVE HAD 8 SUCH ARRESTS THIS YEAR AS COMPARED TO NONE IN 1977. THE ONLY COCAINE ARRESTS LAST YEAR (2) WERE FOR SMALL, NON-COMMERCIAL QUANTITIES. SECONDLY, WITH THE AMOUNT APPARENTLY GOING THROUGH, A PERCENTAGE IS CERTAINLY GOING TO "STICK" IN THE BAHAMAS WHICH COULD HAVE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES FOR THIS SOCIETY. LASTLY, IF COCAINE FROM LATIN AMERICA CAN PROFITABLY BE MOVED THROUGH THE BAHAMAS THEN IT IS PROBABLY THAT ASIAN HEROIN FROM EUROPE COULD BE SO MOVED WITH EQUAL PROFITS AND EASE.

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6. UNLESS DEPT HAS SOME OBJECTION, I PLAN TO BROACH THIS SUBJECT INFORMALLY WITH MIN EX AFF ADDERLEY IN ORDER TO INDICATE OUR CONCERN WITH SITUATION AND TO ELICIT HIS VIEWS ON WHAT STEPS MIGHT BE TAKEN INDEPENDENTLY OR IN CONJUNCTION TO ALLEVIATE IT. LIKEWISE WE WOULD WELCOME DEPT'S COMMENTS ON HOW WE MIGHT BEST APPROACH PROBLEM AT THIS TIME.

SCHWARTZ

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